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Verb Premium Economy Praised in Australia Tuesday 24 January 2005

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Premium Economy Praised in Australia



I just lost my Virginity, and it was great.

I'm no pushover, but it just sort of happened. Maybe it was the very alluring fares and excitement surrounding the launch of flights between Sydney and Hong Kong. Perhaps the promise of big comfy seats, endless entertainment and second-to-none in-flight service got me curious. Not to mention all those rumours. Anyway, I just had to find out for myself.

One minute I'm innocently hanging around Sydney, the next I've booked my first seat on Virgin Atlantic, and I'm on my way to Honkers for a few nights of heady shopping, sightseeing, and degustation between Christmas and New Year. Not just any seat mind you, a Premium Economy seat. I'm not one to tell, but...

Upon arriving at the Virgin Atlantic counter at Sydney Airport, they were already turning on the charm with a separate priority check-in for Premium Economy passengers. A very friendly agent quickly checked me in, allowing plenty of time to ogle the duty-free goodies.

Once onboard, the attentive crew suggested I slip into something more comfortable - like my seat - whilst they fixed me a drink. I looked around with glee. It wasn't just a line; Premium Economy really did only have eyes for me, and twenty-seven others.

Along with a wider seat than average economy class - think Beyonce dancing next to Kylie - the Premium Economy configuration of two, three, two across the aircraft offers even more personal space. With extra padding, leg rests, and a generous recline, these babies were definitely built for comfort.

To put us in the mood, we were offered a glass of champagne, orange juice or water before takeoff. As in a real glass of real French champagne, not a plastic picnic goblet of Spumante. Slurping noisily on my bubbly, so as to be heard back in economy, I couldn't help but notice a colourful, well stacked set of amenities bursting out of the seatback pocket.

I'm a legroom man myself. However, these colourful kits, provided to all Premium Economy and Economy passengers, were more than a handful. Filled with socks, eyeshades, pens (who can ever find one when they need to fill out those customs forms?), notepads, tissues, and big enough to air your dirty laundry in on the way home.

Once in the skies, the crew really put on the moves. Regular drinks, very impressive meals (by airline standards, although I did tell them they were the best I'd ever had), hot towels, and regular rounds of snack food delights such as ice cream and chocolate bars throughout the flight.

Not long after dinner, they quietly dim the lights and lower the shutters. However, this is no time to roll over and go to sleep. The flight is still young, and the fun's just beginning.

Premium Economy and Economy seats are equipped with huge seatback video screens. Understanding that each of us has different tastes and needs at different times, you have 50 movies to choose from. Play, pause, go faster, slower, back a little, and, of course, stop it if it's not doing it for you. Next!


If you feel like a break between sessions, a huge selection of TV shows, computer games, and audio channels await your every command.

Each seat also has its own phone and email address. Of course, you could use these services to communicate with the outside world, but the real fun is in conversing with other passengers for free, by dialling or typing their seat number. And yes, as much fun as heavy breather and "Is Mr Wall there?" prank calls are, I can confirm your seat number does appear at the receivers end.

For those who live by the motto "all work and no play" Premium Economy has in-seat power supply for laptop computers, and if required, the crew will lend you a power adapter cable for free.

Finally, although I'm a material boy, it's as much about personality, and the Virgin Atlantic crew certainly know how to impress in that department. On the Sydney - Hong Kong route, the English and Chinese cabin crew were very helpful, happy and friendly throughout the flight and announced they would be delighted for me to fly with them again! They

For a little more than Economy class and a lot less than Business class, Premium Economy is a great bargain. If your agenda includes getting a little work done, arriving at your destination feeling refreshed, or just treating yourself to a little more onboard space, comfort and relaxation, it might be the time to call one of our team and tell them "I'm having what he's having".



Heat 2 closes 31 January

Virgin Atlantic Manifesto 2004/5

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The article was written by Simon Hillier, freelance writer